

## YOUTH SPEAK OUT

### “WHAT THE MESSAGE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. MEANS TO ME”

*The following are excerpts from an essay written by Zeinab H. Saab of Dearborn High School. He was a high school scholarship winner of the essay on “What the message of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. means to me” as part of the “Arab American Celebrate the Life and Spirit of Martin Luther King Jr.” program hosted by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.*

Martin Luther King Jr., the famous civil rights activist, is most famous for his “I have a dream...” speech. His speech was not only meant for African Americans, but for all mankind. His dream, in my opinion, has not been fully accomplished. Even though, we all try to make believe it is, it isn't. There is still racial discrimination toward mankind. Even though we have made steps toward accomplishing his dream, we have not quite reached it. In order to reach his dream, we have to abolish racial discrimination completely.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s message makes me think twice before acting or talking. In school, kids say things to offend people of other races. The words usually hurt the feelings of the person even though they may think it doesn't affect them, but they do because they're being a racist toward that person. Also, sometimes when we have assigned group projects, where the teacher picks the groups, kids snicker when they're put in a group with a kid that is different. Different meaning a person from a different race or country. That, right there, is an example of racial discrimination. It's not nice to be cruel to a person just

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### “DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.”

*The following are excerpts from an essay written by Mark J. Epps II, a 9th grader at Southwestern Academy in Flint. He was the first place winner of the “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Essay and Poster Contest” sponsored by the Flint Human Relations Commission. The theme of the contest was “Reflections for the Future.”*

...My family has tried to teach me the history of our family, about their life when they were young and about the history of slavery. I have learned from these lessons on history that even though times can be hard, that hard work can pay off and help a person lead a good life. I also learned from these lessons that it is important to earn a good education and how important it is to help others.

My family has also taught me about Martin Luther King Jr. He was a Baptist preacher and became known as the father of the civil rights movement. Dr. King fought against segregation and fought for equal rights. One of his most famous speeches was called “I Have a Dream.” When my grandparents were growing up, they had to live with segregation. My grandparents could only live in certain places and they could not work certain jobs

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

**T**he job of ensuring civil rights is the responsibility of all Michigan residents. The Commission and Department work to both prevent and resolve acts of discrimination based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, marital status, height, weight, arrest record and disability in the areas of employment, education, housing, public accommodation and public service. However, we ask that community members assist us by being our "eyes and ears." We rely on you to contact us when discrimination is occurring, invite us into your community to conduct free training seminars, and follow equal employment practices in your own business.

I am honored to have been elected by my colleagues to chair the Michigan Civil Rights Commission at the start of the

new millennium. After serving as a commissioner for six years, I am pleased to reflect on the past accomplishments of the Commission and Department, and look forward to the possibilities for the future. The Commission will continue to complement efforts toward a more effective and efficient Department of Civil Rights, and will oversee the Department's efforts to be more responsive to local community concerns.

At the Commission meeting in Detroit on February 28, one community member asked that meetings be held in the evenings, so people who work during the day can attend. In response to this request, several monthly Commission meetings a year will now be scheduled to include public comment on Monday evenings and formal Commission busi-



*Commission Chair  
Francisco J. Villarruel, J.D.*

ness on Tuesday morning. The first was Monday, July 24 at 6 p.m. in Grand Rapids. We have also formed a task force to look into the new legislation restricting the legal rights of Michigan prisoners under the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act and Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act.

The Commission continues to increase its efforts to have more public and community input, and remains committed to achieving this goal.

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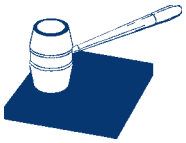
## NEW COMMISSIONER

**B**ishop George E. Brown was appointed by Governor John Engler to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in January 2000. A resident of Detroit, he is pastor of Living Truth Temple in Detroit, which he founded in 1981.

He has been in the ministry for 32 years, and was ordained as bishop in 1988.

Bishop Brown studied for the ministry under the guidance of theologian Dr. Stephen Campbell of Russell St. Baptist Church in Detroit and under Dr. Samuel Williams of the Third Baptist Church in Detroit. He holds a degree in theology and nine certificates of merit from the Michigan State Senate. Through the leadership of Bishop Brown,

Living Truth Temple has a feeding kitchen for the hungry and homeless, and also repairs abandoned, tax reverted properties and offers them to low income families. He brings a unique perspective to the Commission, and looks forward to advancing the cause of civil rights in his new role.



# LEGAL UPDATES

## **Odds Against Affirmative Action**

Schurr, a White man, and an equally qualified Black man, Boykin, were the top choices for a permanent position at a casino. The casino selected the Black man because it was slightly behind in meeting its 25 percent minority hiring goal in that job category. Schurr sued the casino.

The casino argued that it was obligated to hire a minority because a state statute regulating casinos required casinos to take affirmative steps to ensure women, minorities, and persons with disabilities are employed at all levels of the operation.

The Third Circuit stated that unless an affirmative action plan was adopted to remedy a manifest imbalance in traditionally segregated job categories, hiring minority applicants over equally qualified non-minority applicants was in violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Since the casino could not show that its affirmative action plan was drafted to remedy underrepresentation of minorities in traditionally segregated job categories, the court held that the plan violated Title VII. *Schurr v Resorts International Hotel, Inc.*, F3d, 81 FEP Cases 364 (CA 3, 1999) *The U.S. Court of*

*Appeals for the Third Circuit includes Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Virgin Islands.*

## **Would be Firefighter Causes Michigan Court to Smolder**

Sharp, a White man, asserted that yearly since 1990, he had applied for a vacant position as a firefighter with the City of Lansing. Sharp's applications were rejected because of his race, sex, and national origin. Sharp sued the City, and the trial court granted the City a summary disposition because it relied upon a Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) approved affirmative action plan for its hiring decision. The court held that as such, the City was shielded from discrimination claims based on this hiring issue.

On appeal, the Court of Appeals upheld the trial court, but in a strongly worded opinion indicated that it was affirming the trial court only because it was bound to do so by a previous Michigan decision. The court continued that since the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act contains no provision insulating MCRC approved affirmative action plans from review, they should be subject to judicial scrutiny and not provide an absolute protection

to an employer. *David Sharp v City of Lansing*, NW 2d, WL 1099242 (Mich App, Nov. 16, 1999)

## **Court Permits Work Referral to a Doctor**

Sullivan, a teacher since 1977, began exhibiting strange behavior in 1995. The behavior included outbursts, disclosing confidential information to a newspaper, and public criticism of another faculty member.

The employer referred Sullivan for a physical and mental examination. Sullivan refused and was suspended. Sullivan sued under MHCRA and ADA alleging that he was discriminated against because he was regarded as disabled.

On appeal the Sixth Circuit held that an employer's order that an employee who has exhibited strange behavior undergo mental and physical examinations does not suffice to show that an employer regards an employee as disabled. *Richard A. Sullivan v River Valley School District*, F3d, 1999; WL 106753 (Fed App, Nov. 29, 1999) *(The Sixth Circuit covers Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee.)*



# COMMISSION AND DEPARTMENT NEWS

**T**he Michigan Civil Rights Commission meeting on February 28 was held at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. Community leaders and members of the public addressed the Commission during the meeting to describe civil rights challenges in the African American community and propose recommendations for action. Greetings were brought by the Honorable John Conyers Jr., and Detroit Chief of Police Benny Napoleon. The formal presentations came from: Detroit Urban League President and CEO N. Charles Anderson; Detroit Branch NAACP President Rev. Wendell Anthony; Detroit Fair Housing Center Board of Directors Chairperson Emily Hall; National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) Director Dr. Daniel Krichbaum; Michigan Welfare Rights Organization State Chair Maureen Taylor; Inner City Sub-Center Executive Director Paul Taylor Jr.; Wayne County Commission - District 4 Vice Chair Pro Tempore Jewel Ware; and Office of Congressman John Conyers Jr. Public Liaison JoAnn Watson. Two pages of photos taken at the meeting were featured in the March 22 issue of the Michigan Chronicle.

- ◆ Commissioner Francisco J. Villarruel of Plymouth Township was elected to the position of Chair at the Commission meeting

on February 28. Commissioner Gary Torgow of Oak Park was elected Vice Chair, Commissioner Albert Calille of Plymouth was elected Secretary, and Commissioner Valerie P. Simmons of Grand Rapids was elected Treasurer.

- ◆ The former Commission Chair, Judge Richard J. Garcia, had his Investiture to the Ingham County 30th Judicial Court-Family Division on March 3 at Cristo Rey Community Center in Lansing. Current Commission Chair Francisco J. Villarruel and MDCR Director Nan Reynolds presented him with a plaque on behalf of the Commission and Department for the leadership he provided during his tenure as Commission Chair. Former Commissioner Rev. Edgar L. Vann Jr. gave the invocation for the event.
- ◆ At the February 28 Commission meeting, a plaque was given to Senator Jackie Vaughn by the Commission and Department, in honor of his role in establishing the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in Michigan. The plaque was accepted by Jacqui Rowe of Senator Vaughn's office. The Commissioners and Director Nan Reynolds also presented a plaque to outgoing Commissioner

Rev. Edgar L. Vann Jr. of Detroit for his many contributions as a Commissioner.

- ◆ In September 1997, MDCR Director Nanette Lee Reynolds began serving on the Commission on Genetic Privacy and Progress, which was created by Governor John Engler to delve into scientific, ethical, and social policy implications of genetic testing and its use. Then in June 1999, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission unanimously approved a policy statement on genetic testing to assure that Michigan employers and potential employees are aware of state law that offers protection from job discrimination due to genetic predisposition. Director Reynolds stated at this time that genetic testing would be a major civil rights issue of the new millennium. On February 8, 2000, President Clinton signed an executive order prohibiting every federal department and agency from using genetic information in any hiring or promotion action. Then, on March 14, Director Reynolds attended a bill signing by Governor Engler, where he signed into law Public Act 32, which prohibits the use of genetic testing in Michigan.

# MDCR AND HOME DEPOT REACH AGREEMENT

**T**he Michigan Department of Civil Rights announced on May 15 that it reached an understanding with The Home Depot, after a complaint was initiated against the retailer on January 14 for race discrimination.

Home Depot has reiterated its ongoing commitment to equal employment practices, and will cooperate for two years with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights to

ensure monitoring at the Detroit Divisional Office of current employment programs and practices for the Detroit area.

Although the details of the meetings and the understanding are confidential, both the Michigan Department of Civil Rights and Home Depot are fully committed to creating and maintaining an environment that fosters fair and equitable employment practices.

“Michigan residents come to the Department of Civil Rights to file individual complaints. However, as the department is made aware of impactful acts of discrimination, it is important to know that we will not hesitate to initiate our own complaints on behalf of the people of Michigan,” Department of Civil Rights Director Nanette Lee Reynolds said.

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## PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD



*MDCR's Arab-American liaison Leila Saba-Hanna (pictured here, holding the award, with MDCR colleagues) received a Public Service Award from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). She was presented with the award in recognition of her unique contributions to the cause of civil rights pertaining to the Arab-American community.*

## ***“WHAT THE MESSAGE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. MEANS TO ME”***

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because they are new to the country or from a different race or culture than you. Because would you like to be snickered at? People in school are judged by their appearance, brand of their clothes and other materialistic matters. Including class, religion, culture and race. It's sad to admit, but it's part of our society. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message reminds me never to judge a person by anything but their personality and attitude...

In conclusion, I would like to say that Martin Luther King was a courageous man of honor who stood up for what he believed in for the good of all mankind. I believe people shouldn't judge each other by their appearance, race, religion, or culture, but only be judged by their personalities and attitudes. King was not only trying to make peace with other races and show the world that we're all the same, but he was trying to help the world make peace between it's people. It's a shame that a person has to die in order to be heard, but hopefully we have learned from the mistakes of our ancestors. Most important, remember "mistakes are made to teach us, not be repeated." Thanks to this respected, courageous man, we all have the power and hope to stand up for what we believe in.

## ***“DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.”***

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because of their race. My family has a copy of a newspaper article and a picture of my two aunts who slept out on the City Hall lawn to support something called "open occupancy." My grandparents allowed my aunts to sleep out because they supported open occupancy, which would allow a person to live anywhere they wanted. To me the work of Dr. King and even my aunts sleeping out on the City Hall lawn, are both examples of positive action. Sometimes it takes a lot of courage to stand up for what is right and to stand up for what one believes in. This could also be leadership and the job of a leader. To be the best leader you have to you have to be concerned about others...

There are a lot of problems in the world today as we approach the year 2000. Kids don't always feel safe at school, lots of kids don't have homes, and some kids are in jail. But if we can learn from our history about working hard, having the courage to stand up for what is right, and to help others in need, I think the world can be a better place.

## **COMMISSION MEETING DATES**

\*All meetings begin on Mondays at 10:00 a.m. unless otherwise indicated

August 28-29 at the Michigan Historical Library and Museum in Lansing and the Letts' Center. The meeting begins at 6 p.m. on August 28 in the Letts' Center, and 8:30 a.m. on August 29 at Michigan Historical Library and Museum; September 25 at the Mercy Center Office Building in Benton Harbor; and October 30 at the University Center, Central Michigan University, in Mount Pleasant.

**For more information, contact 1-800/482-3604.**

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# FACES AND PLACES

## DETROIT COMMISSION MEETING



*Newly elected Civil Rights Commission officers-left to right: Secretary Albert Calille, Chair Francisco J. Villarruel, Treasurer Valerie P. Simmons and Vice Chair Gary Torgow*



*The Honorable John Conyers Jr., MDCR Director Nan Reynolds and Detroit Chief of Police Benny Napoleon, a former Commission Chair*



*Civil Rights Commission Counsel Sylvia Elliott, Inner City Sub-Center Executive Director Paul Taylor Jr., and MDCR Director Nan Reynolds*



*Newly appointed Civil Rights Commissioner Bishop George E. Brown of Detroit*



*The Commissioners and MDCR Director present a plaque to outgoing Commissioner Rev. Edgar L. Vann Jr. of Detroit*

## Michigan Department of Civil Rights' Customer Service Options

### Information

### Outreach and Education

- ◆ Training
- ◆ Speaker
- ◆ Intervention

### Referral

### Complaint Resolution

1-800-482-3604

[www.mdcr.com](http://www.mdcr.com)

## MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

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